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Strange to say, what they get together sooner or later seems to find uses and buyers, and enters civilised life once more under new outfits. The best objects are not exposed to vulgar gaze—master-dealers know their interests too well for this. They keep them in discreet cover, to be shown with due ceremony and pompous circumstance only to long purses. Prices depend greatly on the general outlook of the buyer. Usually dealers band together and act as one against the foreign customer, especially at auctions. He is warily gauged in every point. There is a sort of freemasonry against him whichever way he may turn, the petty traders acting as pilot-fish for the bigger. Associative ownership and speculation are common. The whole business is a kind of hedging against loss, or compromise between chances either way, with occasional drawings of big premiums. If the buyer have knowledge and experience, he can buy well, is fairly treated, and seldom imposed upon. One may spend a franc, or a hundred thousand, in some of the establishments, and receive adequate value in return.

Elsewhere in Italy the business chiefly divides itself between a few dealers with capital. Here in Florence it is split into so many petty streams that it threatens to dry up altogether, although the

fraternity do hang tenaciously together as to prices. In the vicinity of the Piazza S. Spirito there are not fewer than twenty-five places of sale of bric-a-brac; near Santa Maria Novella, sixteen, and about as many near S. Croce; the rest are scattered widely over the city, which has become a distributing-point for the rest of Europe, attracting dealers from France, Germany, and England, to lay in their home stocks. Not a little also—especially carved furniture, engravings, majolica, tapestries, glass, &c.—has begun to find its way to America. The average annual sales, excluding the auctions, which are considerable, I am told by one of the chief dealers, now reaches 2,000,000 francs yearly by the trade alone, while half as much more is sold by private individuals either as heirlooms or bought on speculation. I fancy this is an under-estimate. At all events, for a widowed capital like Florence, destitute of any great arteries of commerce, these three millions, gained from out of the savings and industries of past centuries, is an item in its resources, as the objects themselves are to its attractions, not to be altogether despised, although by no means symptomatic of a sound prosperity or the wholesomest enterprise.

FLORENCE, March, 1876.

AN HISTORIC PAINTING IN ROME.



HE Art-world of Rome has been much occupied of late with a *chef-d'œuvre*, entitled 'Nero's Illuminations, or the Punishments of the first Christian Martyrs,' by a Polish artist, H. Siemiradski, a young man of only thirty-two years of age. This large painting fills one side of the exhibition-room in the Istituto di Belli Arti, and has attracted

crowds of visitors, to the great advantage of the benevolent society in whose aid the tickets are sold.

The idea of the work is founded upon the passage in the "Annals" of Tacitus, where the ancient historian states that the "Christians were killed with derision, or burned or lighted with torches to make illuminations at night. Nero lent his gardens for this spectacle." The meaning is still further illustrated by the text cut in the upper and lower sides of the gilt frame—

"*Et lux in tenebris lucet et tenebra eam non comprehenderunt.*"

To the first general observation is presented a mass of architecture, marbles, bas-reliefs, and figures, interspersed with stuffs, brocades, and gold, in raised and shining thickness, while jewels, gold, silver, and onyx vessels, mother-of-pearl, mosaic, and floral decorations, gleam with all their inherent richness upon the colossal canvas, so dazzling with brilliancy of colour and modern realism.

Such is the first impression received, but a second and more analysing contemplation distinguishes that the glowing painting portrays a luxurious, amusement-loving Roman court, surrounding, in their hour of greatest sensual indulgence, the licentious and cruel Nero, who is half-reposing in a chariot-palanquin, resplendent with gold and ornament. By his side is the infamous Poppæa, and the canopied, throne-like litter is supported by powerful slaves, the gold of whose garments contrasts effectively with their ebon skin. Nero holds by a chain a tiger, and this animal, fitting symbol of his master, is snapping his fierce mouth in the same direction to which the eyes of the emperor are turned, who is leaning his head, but surely not in remorse, upon his hand as he gazes.

And what is it that fills the faces of some of those semi-nude, lounging, drinking, or gambling men and women with horror, while others have a stolid, indifferent expression, as if sated with such spectacles? And who are those on the right, covered with straw, corded and fastened to high crosses, the poles of which are wreathed with flowers in cruel mockery, to give a festal effect to these living illuminations? The labels attached to each cross explain the dread ceremony, for these are Christians supposed to have set fire to Rome, and thus are they punished. Already, at the red signal, waved by one who stands not far from Nero, torches

are being lighted at the glowing brasier at the base of the crosses, and stalwart men, nude except for the white bands about their loins, are igniting the combustible materials around the doomed Christians. One is a noble, venerable man, the true Christian type; another is a beautiful young woman, whose luxuriant hair is fastened to the cross above her head, while the coverings about her have displayed her white, full neck and bust. And thus the dismal row of crosses extends, the faces decreasing in distinctness in the distance, where the flames begin to burst forth with more brilliancy, and the ladders are being removed as the torches have been applied.

In the foreground of the witnessing crowd reclines a young girl, whose noble features are full of sadness and disgust at the scene. She is covered with rich drapery and gleaming jewels, and her hand falls listlessly upon a mother-of-pearl lute, suspended from her arm by a crimson-velvet attach. The young page at her side, draped with a silver-embossed mantle, as he clutches a wine-ewer, the shining metal of which reflects the light brilliantly, is looking at the martyred ones with youthful horror and excitement. A few others are gazing with fixed and dilated eye at the dread attraction, but most of the beholders are carelessly continuing their revels, while several old Roman veterans stand, with compressed lips, frowning their brows over grim thoughts and remembrances.

From the lowest marble pavement to the summit of the canvas, terrace, steps, and balcony, are crowded with life-size and life-like figures, the men with strongly-marked Roman traits, the women wanton but graceful, with classical and often lovely features. Of one of these, nearly in the centre, whose nude back and profile are seen, it is difficult to decide which is the most prominent, her grace of form, the regularity of her expressionless face, the waving hair, covered with flowers, or the lustre of the immense pearl that hangs from her ear, for each detail in this painting is made with supreme finish.

The palace, background and support of all this variety and multitude of life, is resplendent with its architecture of white and coloured marbles, with its surmounting *quadriga*, its upholding Corinthian columns, its Byzantine balconies, and large bas-reliefs, copies of ancient Art perfect enough to form attractive paintings by themselves. Some of them are touched with gilding, in accordance with a usual Roman manner at the period represented. Each coloured marble has its peculiar gleam and blending.

So in the costumes. The rich tissues, elaborate in hue and design, but scantily draping the voluptuous female forms, are well alternated and relieved by the white tunics of the men, whose heads are mostly encircled by the wreaths of flowers appropriate to festal occasions.

The proportions of the figures, with some few exceptions, give but little opportunity for criticism; but Nero, naturally the most important personage in the scene, seems too small and inconspicuous in comparison with the figures in the foreground, and considering that he is not far behind them, although on the higher terrace of the palace. There is also an objection to be made in reference to the light of the painting, which is very strong, bringing out conspicuously every detail. But the hour is supposed to be that after sunset, although no suggestive red glow lights up the

sky and a broad daylight pervades the scene. Even the torches cast no lurid glare upon the objects or figures near them.

Still the picture remains a marvellous work, with all its variety and sheen. Spite of their ghastly fate, the Christians are composed and happy, and a holy calm seems to rest around that row of wreathed crosses, diminishing the pain with which we regard them. This may be justly considered as the most meritorious part of the painting. Its perspective is especially excellent.

The work will probably be purchased by the Emperor of Russia.

NOTES.

THE CENTENNIAL LOAN EXHIBITION, NEW YORK.—

The splendid collections of pictures now at the Academy of Design and at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in Fourteenth Street, originated, so says the official catalogue, "in the suggestion that the city of New York ought to furnish to its centennial visitors more than its ordinary sources of entertainment." It may not be amiss to say that we believe this suggestion originated in *Appletons' Journal*, which as far back as February last uttered the following: "In this centennial year, when so many strangers will visit us—from abroad, and from far-off sections of our own country—it is peculiarly desirable that they should see something of the Art-treasures of the country. The Centennial Art-Exhibition at Philadelphia will display native productions liberally, of course; but, in view of the exceptionally large number of visitors, we in New York ought to have an Art-exhibition. If there could be gathered in one place the great paintings in the collections of Mr. Stewart, Mr. Belmont, Mr. Lennox, Mr. Olyphant, Mr. Roe, Mr. Wolfe, of the late Mr. Aspinwall and Mr. Blodgett, and those of others, it would be something to the glory of our city, and of great value to those of our people who long to see examples of foreign artists but cannot go abroad to do so. There is no reason why Philadelphia should have a monopoly of centennial attractions; an immense majority of centennial visitors will include New York in their tour, and we should have something of special interest to show them. It is not too late to organise for next summer a grand exhibition of pictures borrowed from private galleries. We do not doubt that in the patriotic fervour of the hour the owners of these pictures would consent to part with them for a few months in the interest of so good a cause." This suggestion was taken up at once by some of the daily papers, and promptly met by a number of picture-owners, the result being that the committee of artists and others who undertook the task have been enabled to present an exhibition of paintings "that has never been surpassed on the continent"—to use again the words of the catalogue. Mr. Belmont had made it a rule not to remove his paintings, but he has thrown open his gallery certain days in the week; Mr. John Taylor Johnson's pictures are at the Metropolitan Museum; while at the Academy of Design are selections from the galleries of ex-Governor E. D. Morgan, Messrs. Parke Godwin, W. L. Andrews, H. E. Howland, John H. Sherwood, M. K. Jessup, John Wolfe, George A. Robbins, R. L. Kennedy, A. R. Eno, Whitelaw Reid, T. A. Havemeyer, R. L. Cutting, R. M. Olyphant, W. H. Osborn, Marshall O. Roberts, D. H. McAlpine, F. N. Otis, S. Hawk, T. B. Musgrave, Israel Corse, James G. Bennett, H. G. Marquand, L. Turnure, R. L. Stuart, P. Van Valkenburg, W. Schaus, T. N. Adams, W. E. Dodge, Jr., M. Knoedler, J. W. Pinchot, David Dudley Field, E. Matthews, W. B. Hart, H. K. Thurber, John Bigelow, B. H. Field, C. W. Griswold, and from those of Mrs. A. T. Stewart, Mrs. C. A. Lamont, Mrs. Paran Stevens, Mrs. Thomas Hicks, Miss C. L. Wolfe, Mrs. Jonathan Sturges, Miss Eliza Bierstadt, Mrs. H. C. Potter.

In the collection are found examples of nearly all leading American and Continental artists, with a few from English painters. It is quite impossible to enumerate all the paintings in these several exhibitions. At the Academy there are pictures of Gérôme's 'Gladiators' and 'Chariot-Race,' a magnificent coast-scene, by Achenbach, and admirable examples of Merle, Alma-Tadema, Schreyer, Rosa Bonheur, Boutibonne, Jules Bréton, Cabanel, Comte Calix, Corot, Coonans, Desgoffe, Dubufe, Frère, Max, Bouguereau, Kaulbach, Lobrichon, Millet, Meissonier, Zama-cois, Horace Vernet, Verboeckhoven, Troyon, and many others; while of our native artists there are paintings by Church, Bierstadt, Kensett, Leutze, Hart, Page, Casilear, Whitteridge, Eastman Johnson, Hicks, Gifford, Durand, Cole, Cropsey, Beard, and others. Mr. Taylor Johnson's collection is specially distinguished by Gérôme's 'Death of Cæsar,' Church's 'Niagara' and 'Twilight in the Wilderness,' and Holman

Hunt's 'Isabella and the Pot of Basil.' These several collections offer our citizens an opportunity of studying many of the best of modern paintings; it is deficient only in examples of the English school, which the Centennial Exhibition at Philadelphia fortunately is rich in, the two exhibitions combined enabling the student to acquaint himself thoroughly with all that is best in the Art of the present century.

PICTURESQUE EUROPE.—"We have received," says the London *Athenæum*, "a large number of impressions from drawings on wood, prepared to illustrate the serial styled 'Picturesque Europe,' published in New York by Messrs. D. Appleton & Co. The artistic qualities of these proofs are generally excellent, both as regards draughtsmanship and cutting on the wood. Some of them are extremely delicate and fine in execution, as 'Medmenham Abbey,' in which the effect of bright, diffused light is perfectly rendered; 'Chee Tor' has similar merits. 'The Entrance to the Peak Cavern,' on the other hand, is strong, and remarkably rich in colour, and capitally drawn to render the characteristics of the rock. 'The Frying-Pan, Lizard,' is a choice example, combining both orders of draughtsmanship with rare solidity. The effect of hazy moonlight has seldom been better rendered than in a view of the Victoria Tower, Westminster; a view of the Pool, London, with a vista of shipping, is first rate. 'Burnham Beeches' could not be better in drawing and modelling; the curious formation of the remarkable rock, called 'The Spindle,' St. Andrews, is vigorously and faithfully rendered; very beautiful is a view in Epping Forest, especially as regards the trees in light in mid-distance. 'Whitby Abbey,' east front, is beautiful in execution and sentiment; a doorway of Rievaulx Abbey is exceptionally brilliant and pure, as well as remarkably rich in that quality which artists prize, *i. e.*, rendering of local colour. Other specimens may be praised highly, *e. g.*, 'Dryburgh Abbey,' 'The Lizard,' 'Entrance to Chepstow Castle,' 'The Church at Stratford-on-Avon,' 'Eton Quadrangle,' 'Windsor Castle,' with mist on the river, 'Ballachulish,' and numerous other illustrations of rocks, rivers, forests, domestic buildings, external and interior views, streets, shipping, castles, mountains, abbeys, tombs, and towers. Such engravings as these must be welcome to the travelled and untravelled public."

THOMAS EARLE.—There is a sad and affecting story recorded in connection with the death of this sculptor, which occurred at his residence in Vincent Street, Ovington Square, on the 28th of April. A correspondent of the London *Times* wrote thus a few days after Mr. Earle's decease: "For above thirty years he exhibited, whenever he had a chance, most artistic works, notably, 'Sin Triumphant,' 'L'Allegro,' 'Hyacinthus,' 'Ophelia,' 'Titania,' 'Miranda,' while his bust of her Majesty, now in his gallery, shows how powerful he was in portrait-busts. Yet his works were frequently rejected by the Royal Academy, and he lay down quietly to die, and did die without a murmur or a pain, on finding that his last work, on which he had been employed three years, 'Alexander the Great,' was rejected by the Royal Academy this year." A melancholy termination to the career of an artist who, for nearly forty years, had been before the public, and most creditably. While a student in the Academy Mr. Earle gained, in 1839, the gold medal and another prize for the best historical group, the subject being 'Hercules delivering Hesione from the Sea-Monster.' For a period of twelve or fourteen years subsequently he worked in the studio of Sir Francis Chantrey as designer and modeller, and under this sculptor he executed the equestrian statue of George IV. in Trafalgar Square. The first work he exhibited at the Academy was in 1834, 'The Age of Innocence, a Group'; the last, 'A Flower-Girl of Capri,' in 1873. He died at the age of sixty-five.